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For Immediate Release

Kentucky Court of Justice creates truancy diversion program — Carroll, Grant and Owen counties are pilot sites —

FRANKFORT, Ky., Dec. 28, 2005 — The Kentucky Court of Justice has announced the creation of a truancy diversion program for students at risk of being charged with a truancy offense and referred to district court or family court. The Truancy Diversion Pilot Program will eventually be available statewide, but schools in Carroll and Grant counties are pilot sites that have already begun this important program for Kentucky's youth. Owen County will begin the pilot program soon.

Students who have missed the number of days allotted to them for a specific school period or who have too many unexcused absences are subject to being charged with a truancy offense and the creation of a formal court record for the offender. Truancy is a status offense, which means it is an act that would not be criminal if committed by an adult.

"Truancy is a complex problem, and truancy prevention requires a collaborative response from educators, law enforcement agencies, courts, communities and families," said District Judge Thomas Funk, who along with District Judge James Purcell will assist with overseeing Truancy Diversion Pilot Program in Carroll, Grant and Owen county schools.

Judge Purcell noted that, "This program brings all parties together not only to address student absenteeism, but also the negative social, legal and financial consequences that result from persistent absences."

The truancy diversion program uses a team approach to help students develop good attendance habits and improve their overall school experience. The team is made up of judges, court designated workers, school counselors, principals, directors of pupil personnel, and family resource staff.

The Court Designated Worker Program, under the direction of Administrative Office of the Courts' Department of Juvenile Services, will facilitate the Truancy Diversion Pilot

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Program. Court designated workers will hold weekly meetings, with parents and student present, to review his or her attendance record, behavior and grades, and to develop a plan for success. Judges will periodically attend meetings to reinforce the work of the truancy diversion team and to offer encouragement and recognition to participating students for progress made.

The Court Designated Worker Program was created in 1986 by legislation enacted by the Kentucky General Assembly, which provided for each of the state's 120 counties to have the services of a court designated worker. Court designated workers are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to process complaints against individuals under the age of 18. The purpose of the Court Designated Worker Program is to serve the best interests of the child and to provide redress for offenses without court action and without the creation of a formal court record.

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